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National security

VS.

academic freedom

Administration wants to stem outflow
of 'high tech'; will research suffer?

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Washington

The Reagan administration is moving steadily to stop the flow of military related technology to the Soviet Union. At the same time, scientists and academics are just as steadily resisting what they see as heavy-handed infringements on research and the free exchange of information. This debate between "national security" and "academic freedom" has at times been tense. But there are indications that both sides want to see the controversy resolved voluntarily rather than by government fiat.

In congressional testimony this week, the CIA's deputy director, Adm. Bobby Inman, conceded that some of his earlier pronouncements on the subject had been inflammatory. He pointed out that government intelligence officials and private researchers have worked out an agreement on guarding information dealing with cryptography (the making and breaking of codes).

At the same hearing, National Academy of Sciences president Frank Press noted that the Defense Department "has agreed to support and cooperate" in a year-long study on the export of technology. A panel of distinguished scientists, academicians, and business leaders, many of whom have served in high government posts, would conduct the study.

"This is unquestionably a sensitive and complex problem," Assistant Commerce Secretary Lawrence Brady told the lawmakers. "We are striving to restrict the transfers of technology that impair our national security while not unduly burdening scientific research."

The key words in Mr. Brady's comment are "impair" and "unduly." They are highly subjective. But the administration has defined them to its satisfaction and is taking steps to stem what Admiral Inman describes as an "enormous outflow." Among them:

- The administration last week withdrew its financial support for the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Austria, which has 17 member nations from NATO and the Warsaw Pact. US officials cited "Soviet abuse" of the scientific information exchanged there.

- The Defense Department is seeking a new security classification covering technological and scientific information. Such information could more easily be kept secret under the administration proposal. In a recent letter to national security adviser William Clark, Frank Press of the National Academy of Sciences warned that this could cause many universities to stop work in these areas "and

thus deny to the Defense Department this important basic research resource."

- The administration has stopped sending the Soviet Embassy unclassified Commerce and Defense Department reports on high technology matters. It also has stepped up enforcement efforts under the Export Administration Act.

"As academic institutions have become increasingly involved in research for industrial applications, more technology becomes potentially subject to the regulations," Assistant Commerce Secretary Brady said. "We focus on preventing the transfer of scientific research involving nonpublic data that is related to industrial processes and could endanger US security."

- The Defense Department is adding to its list of "militarily critical technologies," which covers more than 600 items in such categories as computers, lasers, metals and alloys, and telecommunications. This list covers "technologies whose acquisition by potential adversaries would be detrimental to national security," and is used by the Commerce Department in deciding whether to license exports.

The government-scientific community debate is increasingly being reflected on Capitol Hill. Rep. George Brown (D) of California calls the administration's policies "short-sighted," and notes that "some of our closest allies" not only provide much scientific information to the Soviet Union but engage in "occasional industrial espionage" against the United States.

Sen. Jake Garn (R) of Utah, on the other hand, has introduced legislation that would establish a new Office of Strategic Trade. The House is considering a bill giving the Secretary of Defense greater power to regulate the disclosure of certain technological information.

There is general acknowledgment that the line between "pure" research and industrial or military technology is becoming less distinct. Many experts feel that Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile guidance systems may have benefited from freely available US technology.

"With few exceptions, the development of high technology, whatever the source, has military impact," says George Millburn, the Pentagon's man in charge of research and advanced technology.